

## **LAWRENCE-DOUGLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

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### **Cryptosporidiosis Investigation**

The total number of laboratory-confirmed cases of cryptosporidiosis as of September 1 is 23. The age range of infected persons is one through 70 years. Of the 23 laboratory-confirmed cases, fourteen, or 61 percent, are children age 18 and younger. Nine, or 39 percent, are adults.

Cryptosporidiosis is a diarrheal disease caused by a microscopic parasite, which can live in the intestine and is passed in the stool of the infected person or animal. The symptoms of cryptosporidiosis include diarrhea, loose or watery stools, stomach cramps, upset stomach, and a slight fever. For many people, symptoms can be mild. Symptoms generally occur within 2 to 10 days of infection. They last about two weeks, but may go in cycles of getting better then worse before the illness ends. People may excrete the parasite for up to two weeks after diarrhea has stopped. The infection may be very severe in people with impaired immune systems.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment are assisting the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department in conducting an epidemiological investigation into the causes and extent of the *Cryptosporidium* outbreak in Douglas County.

The investigation into the cause and magnitude of the outbreak continued in full force over the Labor Day weekend. We received over 600 responses to our school survey and we have been actively calling those persons reporting diarrhea on the survey. Since Wednesday evening Health Department staff have been calling community members and conducting a short survey to find additional cases. Community members who currently have diarrhea and those who have had diarrhea within the last two weeks have been advised to come to the Health Department to pick up stool specimen kits and return them for laboratory testing as soon as possible. The Health Department will have extended hours throughout this week to continue to issue stool collection kits and receive specimens. The stool specimens are being analyzed by the KDHE laboratory.

The Health Department anticipates an increase in the numbers of laboratory-confirmed cases as a result of this active solicitation of specimens during the investigation. We are in the process of developing an extensive questionnaire that will be conducted with community members, both ill and well persons, to determine how individuals may have become exposed to the illness. The questionnaire will ask about activities interviewees have taken part in that may have increased their risk for becoming ill. Individuals will also be provided with guidelines to prevent further spread of the illness to others. Information gathered through the investigation will be analyzed to determine common risk factors among those who test positive. The investigation process and identification of the risk factors for the spread of illness is a process that takes time. However, we do not need to know the final results to make public health interventions.

The public health interventions we have undertaken since July 24 when the first case was identified include:

- Increasing surveillance efforts and case finding through local physician offices, urgent care centers, and the emergency room.
- Informing swimmers not to swim if they have diarrhea and for two weeks after their diarrhea stops.
- Making on-site visits to day care facilities associated with laboratory-confirmed cases to evaluate sanitation and diapering practices, and to stress hand washing and disinfection of toys.
- Closing and requiring hyper-chlorination of some community pools.
- Preparing and distributing information to pool operators on how to handle fecal accidents.
- Distributing flyers regarding measures swimmers can take to help prevent contamination of community swimming pools.
- Working with the media to inform the general public about actions they can take to protect themselves from infection.

The Health Department recommends the following actions to protect community members:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet and before handling or eating food.
- Wash hands after every diaper change, even if you are wearing gloves.
- Protect others by not swimming if experiencing diarrhea. Do not swim for two weeks after the diarrhea has stopped.
- Avoid swallowing pool or lake water when swimming.
- Avoid drinking untreated water from shallow wells, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds and streams.
- Wash and/or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating.

For more information, individuals may call the Health Department at (785) 843-0721.